

Week 8 Final Project:

Strategic Human Resource Management in U.S. Marine Corps Aviation

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## **Executive Summary**

### ***Overview***

The following assignment concerns the current role and future of strategic human resource management (SHRM) within Marine aviation—a dedicated element of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and an organization widely regarded as the nation’s premier military force in combat readiness. Marine aviation is primarily concerned with meeting the unique combat and support needs of its parent institution across a wide spectrum of theaters and operations.

This investigation is separated into seven sections, opening with an executive summary and concluding with several key recommendations. Intervening sections include a brief introduction to the USMC and Marine aviation; a strategic and functional analysis of Marine aviation; a review of the current state of human resources (HR) in Marine aviation; and findings associated with the potential implementation of human capital strategies within Marine aviation.

### ***Objective***

Strategic human capital (SHC) generally affects the people, policies, and processes of virtually every modern business in today’s economically competitive environment. The influence of SHC is also felt in public and non-profit sectors where human resource management (HRM) practices and strategic leadership are of tantamount concern. This assignment focuses on the latter of these two areas, with the core objective of facilitating the development and comprehension of human capital projects through the theoretical application of SHC principles to a real-world governmental organization.

## ***Purpose***

The purpose of this academic investigation is to illustrate a fundamental understanding of the key materials and concepts presented in Professor Ralph Gigliotti's MPA 8004 Public Personnel Management Course at Villanova University. This paper serves as a capstone assignment and provides a comprehensive analysis of several SHRM theories presented over the past seven weeks of instruction. Ultimately, it is designed to familiarize the author/student with strategic human capital management (SHCM) approaches through the practical application of vital ideas using a real-life agency.

## ***Required Action***

The author employs a fourfold approach in applying several theories and principles of SHRM to Marine aviation. First, he describes how Marine aviation, as a vital element of a larger governmental organization (the U.S. Marine Corps), could theoretically implement a SHC system. Second, the author discusses the main functions of how a SHC system operates relative to five key SHRM factors:

- Motivation
- Job Analysis & Workforce Planning
- Compensation & Benefits
- Performance Management
- Development, Training & Providing New Opportunities

Third, the author addresses organizational obstacles complicating or otherwise preventing the complete implementation of a human capital plan (HCP) within the ranks of Marine aviation as it exists today. Finally, the author provides several recommendations regarding human resources/human capital efficiency, productivity, and success for the future of Marine aviation.

## ***Findings***

USMC policy-makers and aviation leaders administer over a fundamentally sound SHC system. Nevertheless, there are two critical problems with the current state of HR within Marine aviation that require serious attention. A training duality, that saturates aviation Marines with an overwhelming number of conflicting commitments, and obstacles preventing individual Marines from accessing certain key benefits are degrading the overall quality, competency, and abilities of Marine aviation. The author does not offer a magical “cure-all” or panacea for these issues but instead provides a critical analysis that will hopefully lead to further conversations on the topic and potential solutions to the problems currently befalling Marine aviation.

## ***Summary***

Through the exploration and application of critical SHC system practices, the author intends to offer a critical workforce analysis of Marine aviation. The exercise is theoretical in nature and intended to meet the assignment requirements as outlined in the present course of study. The author supports his observations and recommendations with background examples and findings applicable to the current state of HR within Marine aviation. A detailed summary of these findings and recommendations precede the conclusion section of this paper.

## **Introduction**

The following introduction is intended to give readers not otherwise affiliated with the military establishment a contextual reference point regarding the USMC and Marine aviation. Both organizations are steeped in a rich historical tradition that permeates the very fabric of their operational existence. Extended commitments abroad, however, have placed a significant strain on Marine aviation—a development all too apparent in recent years. Politicians, Department of Defense policy-makers, and Marine Corps leaders are currently facing grim economic and material challenges that will dictate the capabilities and composition of the USMC and Marine aviation in the coming decades. Attentive readers will undoubtedly note that little mention is made of SHC concerns in this section of the paper. The omission is deliberate and an intentional means of juxtaposing the forthcoming SHRM argument against a backdrop of fiscal, material, and staffing issues—all of which significantly influence present and future Marine aviation SHC concerns.

## ***Background***

In 1970, Kenneth W. Estes, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel, professor of modern history, and prolific author reflected that, “To many observers, it [the Marine Corps] is a military anomaly—a Marine is a ‘soldier and sailor too.’ But any cursory reading of military history tells us that navies from their inception had a fundamental need for expert troops to guard ships and stations as well as to extend the force of naval power ashore” (1996, p. 8). Nearly fifty years later, Estes’s remarks still hold true. Despite radical advancements in technology and communications, humanity is still bound to the sea. Maritime transport and transoceanic trade are the literal lifeblood of modern, global societies. Since the Age of Sail, powerful navies stood

watch over vital maritime shipping lanes and, in keeping with their parent nations' political and economic interests, projected military power abroad.

Naval combat is nothing new, men fought battles at sea thousands of years before curious Europeans first set foot in the New World. War and the fate of nations, however, are ultimately decided on land. It is at this unique juncture where Marines, or "soldiers of the sea" fill a demanding and distinct role. Part battle-hardened infantrymen and part swaggering sailors, modern Marines are trained in the art of amphibious warfare; a specific mode of combat aimed at projecting sea power ashore. Amphibious warfare, in years past, was marked by large-scale beach assaults, as seen in the Pacific Theater of World War Two. The flying of the American flag by a victorious group of U.S. Marines and Navy Corpsmen at Iwo Jima, for instance, is forever etched in our nation's collective memory. Twenty-first-century amphibious doctrine, however, calls for flexible and compact interdiction operations, policing actions, and relief efforts abroad. It is in these latter capacities that the USMC is regarded as the world's premier combat force in readiness—an organization that prides itself on its ability to project American interests across the globe in a literal matter of hours (Kenneth, 1996, *ix*).

Founded in conjunction with the birth of our nation, the USMC has existed in one form or another for over 240 years. On November 10, 1775, the Second Continental Congress charged the Continental Marines with the protection of colonial interests at sea (Chenoweth & Nihart, 2005, pp. 33-34). These early forerunners of today's U.S. Marines were a tough group of men who routinely engaged in ship-to-ship fighting and hard-fought landing operations against their British adversaries and rouge corsairs. Assignments, compositions, and roles changed a great deal over the intervening centuries but the core mission of the Marine Corps remained relatively unchanged. Since the Continental Marines raided a British fort in the Bahamas in 1776, the

organization's primary responsibility is still the projection of American naval power ashore (Chenoweth & Nihart, 2005, p. 14).

The twentieth-century ushered in a new era of technological change, unprecedented in size and scope. Industrialization and urbanization, for better or worse, dramatically altered the global landscape by connecting people on a much larger and rapid scale than years past. One major innovation taking shape near the outset of the century was the introduction of aircraft; airborne vehicles that fundamentally changed the way modern societies traveled, communicated, and waged wars. One of the earliest pioneers in military aviation was Marine Lieutenant Alfred A. Cunningham who, on May 22, 1912, reported to the U.S. Naval Academy for aviation combat training—a day celebrated by many Marines as the birth of Marine aviation (Air & Space Magazine, 2012).

Although military aircraft were initially limited, World War I combat aviators performed valuable reconnaissance missions, staged limited attacks on ground targets, and shot down enemy aircraft (Air & Space Magazine, 2012). Technology continued to advance rapidly, allowing military pilots to fundamentally alter the face of combat by the conclusion of the Second World War. Newly-commissioned aircraft carriers allowed attack planes to reach faraway targets, while sophisticated strategic bombers could deliver utterly devastating payloads, including horrific atomic bombs. Subsequent conflicts continued to spur innovation within military aviation. Marines pioneered the use of combat helicopters during the Korean War, which led to the development and refinement of vertical envelopment tactics utilized during conflicts across parts of Eurasia, Africa, and the Middle East over the past half-century (Air & Space Magazine, 2012).

### *Marine Aviation Today*

While it might seem an oversimplified observation, given the enormity, complexity, and lethality of today's national security environment, it is nevertheless accurate to say that Marines play the part of middleweight boxers; they are at once expected to provide the power and explosiveness of their heavyweight counterparts, yet remain nimble enough to avoid the stinging counterpunches of their lighter opponents. Strategists and military planners use jargon such as an "expeditionary force in readiness," capable of executing, "full-spectrum operations across the ROMO [range of military operations]," but the point remains unchanged (Davis, 2017, p. 2). The USMC is a powerful and compact military force capable of responding to various global crises on a moment's notice. It is an organization specializing in lightning-fast offensive operations, while leaving occupying and sustainment actions for larger forces, such as regional allies, coalition peacekeepers, and the U.S. Army (Estes, 1996, pp. 8-13). Marine Corps policy-makers are currently implementing a major realignment policy, aimed at returning the USMC to its organizational roots. Marines, and Marine aviation in particular, are stretched precariously thin after fifteen years of protracted conflict abroad (Eckstein, 2017).

Despite being one of the smallest branches of the U.S. military, today's USMC still stands at the forefront of America's interests abroad. The organization technically falls under the Department of the Navy and musters roughly 180,000 active duty Marines who operate on an approximate budget of \$25 billion per year (Davis, 2017, pp. 2-5). While this seems significant, consider its parent organization, that boasts over 430 warships, 1,000 aircraft, and 431,000 sailors operating off \$165 billion annually (U.S. Navy, 2016). The Air Force is slightly larger than the Marine Corps, with 205,000 active airmen but a \$120 billion budget—almost five times what Marines receive annually (Martin, 2016). The U.S. Army remains atop the defense

spending heap, with end-strength numbers nearing *half a million* soldiers who consume nearly *\$300 billion* per year (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017)!

Compounding matters is the fact that Marine aviation is only one small part of a greater organization, the USMC, operating within an even larger agency, the U.S. Navy, which is forced to allocate limited funds and personnel across a broad spectrum of departments and applications. Of the approximate 182,000 active duty Marines engaged in worldwide service, only 40,687 possess military occupational specialties (MOSs) associated with Marine aviation (Davis, 2017, p. 226). This relatively small group, which comprises less than one-quarter of the overall end-force, includes everything from pilots and mechanics to air traffic controllers and aviation supply clerks. Financially, Marine Corps leaders anticipate spending \$649 million on air operations in 2017, only 3% of the USMC's total operating budget (Davis, 2017, p. 226).

Fiscal and staffing constraints, in the face of prolonged conflict abroad, have placed Marine aviation under tremendous operational strain. Marine pilots fly over twenty different types of aging aircraft that Marine maintainers are constantly struggling to keep in the air, despite numerous logistical challenges and a rapidly dwindling supply of spare parts (Eckstein, 2017). Airframe fatigue, coupled with increasing operational demands, incrementally contributed to decreased pilot training and a reduction in flight hours (Freedberg, 2017). These adverse developments, in turn, have contributed to an alarming string of aircraft accidents and mishaps, culminating in a very risky environment.

A recent *Breaking Defense* article, citing dangerous issues associated with the USMC's fleet of aging aircraft, warned that, "If you know a young person who dreams of flying for their country over land and sea, tell them they're a lot safer in the Navy than in the Marines... aircraft accidents have killed 62 Marines in the last six years, compared to just 10 personnel from the

much larger Navy” (Freedberg, 2017). In an interview with the *Marine Corps Times*, Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller, addressed the heart of the matter by observing that, “We’ve run our stuff pretty hard, just like the Navy has run their ships pretty hard. In order to make mission and to do what we had to do, there’s been some deferred maintenance. We’re at the point now where we have to fix the stuff” (Schogol, 2016). “Fixing stuff,” however, is only one part of the equation. Marine Corps leaders and policy-makers are also engaged with myriad other concerns, such as the overall mission, organizational goals, and strategic objectives of Marine aviation—three crucial elements discussed in the next section of this analysis.

## **Strategic & Functional Analysis**

### ***Introduction***

The following section, similar to the preceding segment, is intended to provide those unfamiliar with the subject matter a bit more context concerning the mission, organization, and strategic objectives of Marine aviation. Of additional note, is the shift in academic focus from the more organic aspects of Marine aviation to specific SHRM issues, such as training and development programs conceived in response to organizational concerns. Economic, material, and staffing challenges present considerable obstacles to Marine aviation policy-makers who, like other professionals in the public sector, have turned to SHC planning in attempting to resolve overarching, organizational issues and concerns.

### ***Mission***

The National Security Act of 1947 provides a detailed description of the USMC's mission, with Congress dictating that:

The United States Marine Corps, within the Department of the Navy, shall include land combat and service forces and such aviation as may be organic therein. The Marine Corps shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign. It shall be the duty of the Marine Corps to develop, in coordination with the Army and the Air Force, those phases of amphibious operations which pertain to the tactics, technique, and equipment employed by landing forces. In addition, the Marine Corps shall provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy, shall provide security detachments for the protection of naval property at naval stations and bases, and shall perform such other duties as the President may direct: Provided, that such additional duties shall not detract from or interfere with the operations for which the Marine Corps is primarily organized. The Marine Corps shall be responsible, in accordance with integrated joint mobilization plans, for the expansion of peacetime components of the Marine Corps to meet the needs of war (Hittle, 2013).

The above passage represents an important piece of legislation that continues to influence every branch of the U.S. military since its introduction sixty years ago. Moreover, it specifically prescribes that the USMC shall utilize combined arms, or the coordinated use of land, sea, and

air assets, to accomplish amphibious operations, joint mobilizations, and “other duties” as directed by the President of the United States (Hittle, 2013). The consequent mission of Marine aviation, as an integral element of the 21<sup>st</sup> century MAGTF (Marine Air Ground Task Force), is to engage in:

[M]aneuver warfare through a combined arms approach that embraces information warfare as indispensable for achieving complementary effects across five domains – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. The 21st century MAGTF... blends maneuver warfare and combined arms to generate the combat power needed for simultaneity of action in its full range of missions. The 21st century MAGTF operates and fights at sea, from the sea, and ashore as an integrated part of the naval force and the larger combined/joint force” (Davis, 2017, p. 6).

In condensed and simplified terms, Marine aviation’s entire existence is predicated upon the mission of the basic rifleman, who composes the backbone of USMC operating force. Regardless of individual dictates, every supporting unit, weapon system, or procedure is established, trained, and utilized with the specific intention of sustaining Marine Corps infantry units. This ethos is instilled in every individual Marine who, regardless of rank or occupational specialty, is indoctrinated and trained as a basic rifleman. Hence, even Marine Corps pilots and maintainers must observe essential physical fitness and marksmanship standards while simultaneously maintaining technical proficiency within their respective occupational specialties.

### ***Organization***

Marine aviation is separated into seven major sections, each staffed by a senior-level officer, who reports to one of three brigadier generals (Davis, 2017, p. 213). Each of these generals, or “assistant deputy commanders,” preside over one of three major aviation programs: Mobilization, Plans and Programs, or Sustainment (Davis, 2017, p. 213). Every assistant deputy commander then reports to the Deputy Commandant of Aviation—usually a lieutenant general who, in turn, reports to the chief officer of the entire USMC, the Commandant of the Marine

Corps (CMC) (Davis, 2017, p. 213). The current CMC is General Robert Neller, a former armor officer and the 37<sup>th</sup> general to fill the position (U.S. Marine Corps, 2017).

Several unique Marine aviation organizations—Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1), Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1), Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron One (VMX-1), four Marine Aviation Training Support Groups (MATSGs), and two special Marine Aviation Detachments (MADs)—fall outside of the conventional organizational hierarchy (Davis, 2017, pp. 214-215). MAWTS-1 is responsible for the specialized technical and tactical training of promising young Marine Corps aviators; HMX-1 reports to the White House and is responsible for the safe transport of the President, his cabinet members, and supporting staff aboard “Marine One;” and VMX-1 stands at the forefront of testing and implementing prototype technologies and experimental procedures into the mainstream Marine aviation community (Davis, 2017, pp. 214-215). The individual training groups—located in Florida, Texas, and Virginia—train new aviators, mechanics, and technicians for deployment to the Fleet Marine Forces (Davis, 2017, pp. 214-215). The two special detachments, MAD China Lake and MAD Patuxent River, perform special development and training functions as directed by the Commandant of Aviation (Davis, 2017, p. 215).

Marine aviation installations, operational assets, and personnel are generally spread across four aircraft “wings” (Davis, 2017, pp. 221-224). The First Marine Aircraft Wing (1<sup>st</sup> MAW) is headquartered out of Japan and includes bases on the Japanese mainland, Okinawa, and Hawaii (Davis, 2017, p. 221). Headquarters, Second Marine Aircraft Wing (2<sup>nd</sup> MAW) is located at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina (Davis, 2017, p. 222). Two other installations fall under 2<sup>nd</sup> MAW’s umbrella, including air stations in New River, North Carolina and Beaufort, South Carolina (Davis, 2017, p. 222). The Third Marine Aircraft

Wing (3<sup>rd</sup> MAW) is located at MCAS Miramar, California (Davis, 2017, p. 223). Other installations falling under this command's umbrella include Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California and MCAS Yuma, Arizona (Davis, 2017, p. 223). The Fourth Marine Aircraft Wing (4<sup>th</sup> MAW) controls installations and assets across the country but is primarily a reserve unit and beyond the scope of the present discussion (Davis, 2017, p. 224).

Marine Aircraft Wings are further divided into Marine Air Groups (MAGs) and Marine Air Control Groups (MACGs) (Davis, 2017, pp. 222-224). The former is primarily responsible for fielding and maintaining combat and support squadrons of various fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, capable of performing a variety of functions on the battlefield (Davis, 2017, pp. 222-224). The latter contain various logistical and communication squadrons that provide direct support to combat aviation units (Davis, 2017, pp. 222-224). A typical MAG may contain anywhere from four to twelve squadrons, depending upon its unique composition and mission. Marine Air Group-14 (MAG-14), for example, contains eleven squadrons: one Marine Aviation Logistics Support Squadron (MALS), three Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadrons (VMAQs), three Marine Attack Squadrons (VMAs), one Marine Attack Training Squadron (VMAT), one Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron (VMGR), one Marine Wing Support Squadron (MWSS), and one Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron (VMU) (Davis, 2017, pp. 222-224).

The size, composition, and capabilities of Marine Corps squadrons vary with the type of aircraft and personnel assigned to each unit; both of which are determined by mission requirements directed down from higher up the chain of command. Principally, however, Marine aviation is divided between an assortment of rotary and fixed-wing aircraft. Rotary-wing aircraft encompass everything from attack helicopters, like the AH-1W "Super Cobra," to the

sophisticated tiltrotor transport MV-22B “Osprey” (Davis, 2017, pp. 239-241). Fixed-wing aircraft include a variety of jets and turboprop assets, such as the brand-new F-35 B/C “Lightning II” stealth fighter and the aging KC-130J “Hercules” cargo plane (Davis, 2017, pp. 232-238). Unique aircraft include specialized platforms, such as the VH-60N presidential support helicopter and several cutting-edge, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) used extensively in recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (Davis, 2017, p. 245-251).

Squadrons are normally staffed by an assortment of personnel, ranging anywhere from 100-300 Marines and a handful of U.S. Naval medical support staff (Davis, 2017, pp. 215-217). The bulk of squadron personnel are maintainers, who are charged with keeping flight assets airworthy; pilots and navigators, who operate aircraft; administrative and operational personnel, who coordinate many of the “behind the scenes” functions necessary for the squadron to function daily; and a command element, which includes a commanding officer, executive officer, and senior enlisted advisor (Davis, 2017, pp. 215-217). Squadron maintenance departments are further divided into production, management, and quality assurance work divisions, all of which are responsible for a variety of technical functions, including the monitoring and administration of various safety and technical training programs (Davis, 2017, pp. 215-217).

### ***Strategy***

Marine aviation is a dynamic department operating within an energetic and heavily-tasked organization. Marine Corps management practices are fundamentally based upon mission accomplishment, organizational accountability, and decentralized leadership. Proactive leaders tend to “lean forward” rather than reacting to unexpected challenges. Marine aviation policy-makers are therefore concerned with realigning, modernizing, and training an exclusive force of pilots and support staff capable of maintaining a constant state of readiness for the for the

foreseeable future. In the words of current Deputy Commandant of Aviation, Lieutenant General Jon Davis, “The Marine aviation portfolio continues to evolve as we address the challenges and trends of the current and future operational environment” (2017, p. 3).

The MAGTF serves at the foundation of the USMC’s realignment plan and is the primary organizational vehicle by which Marine aviation executes its duties and responsibilities across the globe. Each MAGTF is composed of specially organized groups dedicated to fulfilling specific operational goals at sea, on the ground, and in the air (Davis, 2017, p. 8). The Aviation Combat Element (ACE) of the MAGTF contains all of the air assets employed by the USMC during typical combat, policing, and interdiction operations (Davis, 2017, pp. 8-10). The ACE commander’s job is to conduct “distributive aviation operations (DAO) in support of land and/or naval campaigns... independent of specialized fix infrastructure” (Davis, 2007, p. 8). The ACE is an autonomous unit, capable of self-deploying and self-sustaining aviation assets for limited periods. When assigned to a larger expeditionary force, such as a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the ACE and MAGTF are responsible for initially projecting sea power ashore (Davis, 2007, pp. 8-9). Out of 182,000 active duty Marines, approximately 30,000 are forward-deployed and attached to one of these expeditionary units in varying capacities, with aviation Marines comprising approximately one-quarter of the force structure (Davis, 2007, pp. 226-227).

Aircraft and equipment assigned to MAGTFs are sourced from over 22,000 pieces of Marine Corps “structure” currently assigned to fleet units at home and abroad (Davis, 2017, p. 226). These assets include approximately twenty different types of rotary and fixed-wing aircraft, ground support equipment, and UAVs (Davis, 2017, p. 226). There is currently an enormous effort underway to inject new technology into an aging fleet that is often criticized for high mishap rates, costly accidents, and the unnecessary loss of lives (Freedberg, 2017). New aircraft,

maintenance contracts, and the procurement of spare parts are costly, however, and place considerable stress on the USMC's already limited aviation coffer (Eckstein, 2017). Earlier this year, Marine aviation leaders petitioned Congress for financial aid, over and above their mandated budget cap. In March, Lieutenant General Davis testified before Congress that Marine aviation was only at 67% of its spare parts requirements, which adversely impacts aircraft readiness across the fleet (Eckstein, 2017). Lower readiness numbers contribute to decreased flight hours that ultimately translate into training deficiencies. Undertrained and inexperienced pilots are at greater risk of making mistakes in the cockpit, which lead to mishaps that endanger lives and place an even greater fiscal strain on the USMC's limited operating budget.

Marine aviation, to offset material shortages and fiscal shortfalls, began adapting and implementing several robust training programs near the turn of the decade. At the core of the massive training effort is the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE), a joint program launched by Navy and Marine aviation, dedicated to "working together and committed to open information sharing and process improvement across naval aviation stakeholder organizations" (Davis, 2017, p. 204). Sub-elements of this program include the objective measurement of core competencies, within the context of combat readiness, and the tracking of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which provide a quantifiable means of measuring proficiency and success (Davis, 2007, p. 205).

### *Analysis*

In broad analytical strokes, Marine aviation is faced with two strategic challenges. The first issue involves rejuvenating an aging fleet of aircraft after years of continuous and demanding use in a variety of austere environments. The second obstacle is consequent to the first. Tired aircraft, lacking appropriate replacement parts, are spending greater amounts of time on the ground where they do little to increase the skill and proficiency of pilots in need of critical

flight training. In response to these threats, the Marine Corps has petitioned Congress for increased spending caps across its aviation community. In addition to addressing their budget, Marine aviation leaders began working in tandem with their Navy counterparts to implement a series of training programs aimed at increasing combat readiness while decreasing costs.

Subsequent sections of this assignment contain more detailed information about this innovative training and development philosophy. The ultimate effectiveness of these initiatives will only be revealed through the passage of time. Marine Corps planners and aviation policy-makers will undoubtedly keep a close eye on these troubling problems and their potential remedies for the foreseeable future.

## **Review of the Current State of Human Resources**

### ***Introduction***

Effective SHC systems necessitate the inclusion and consideration of five major factors: (1) Motivation, (2) Job Analysis & Workforce Planning, (3) Compensation & Benefits, (4) Performance Management, and (5) Development, Training & the Providing of New Opportunities (Selden, 2009, p. 10). The following section provides a detailed review of the current state of HR within Marine aviation. Most practices, within the context of the SHC system, are exclusive to Marine aviation. Collaborative Naval and Marine aviation efforts to develop and implement aggressive training standards, for example, rarely affect USMC departments outside aviation. Several practices, however, are institutional processes shared across the Marine Corps that influence and occasionally dictate the course of human capital development within Marine aviation. Motivation, for instance, is a key aspect of wearing the uniform and embracing the Marine Corps lifestyle, regardless of individual assignment or occupational specialty.

### ***Motivation***

Motivation is arguably one of the most researched, yet least understood, aspects of the SHC system. Interdisciplinary theorists have attempted to elucidate upon this ethereal concept since the mid-twentieth-century. Two prevailing schools of thought view motivation as a matter of satisfying desires within the context of external or internal incentives. Classic theories, like Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (1954), suggest that people simply react to external stimuli out of the desire to satisfy essential needs such as the acquisition of food, shelter, and water (Codrey, 2005, p. 529). More intricate content theories, such as David McClelland's 1961

*Needs Theory*, expand and elaborate upon Maslow's principles (Codrey, 2005, p. 534). Process theories, meanwhile, are more concerned with "how one gets motivated" rather than "what motivates the individual" (Codrey, 2005, pp. 528-529). Philosophies in this group include Victor Vroom's *Expectancy Theory* (1964), John Stacey Adams's *Equity Theory* (1965), and Edwin Locke and Gary Latham's 1979 *Goal-Setting Theory* (Codrey, 2005, pp. 536-540).

One of the leading researchers and authors dedicated to exploring this topic is the corporate strategist, Daniel Pink. In his best-selling 2009 work, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Pink posits the idea that most people primarily act out of an intrinsic need to satisfy the three key desires of autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Pink, 2009, pp. 70-72). Of greater influence than external inducements, argues Pink, are a person's overwhelming desires to maintain a sense of independent authority in the workplace, exhibit a technical mastery of one's vocation, and work towards a goal, or purpose, larger than one's self (Pink, 2009, pp. 83-130).

One of the most valuable SHRM assets available to Marine aviation is motivation. Unlike some of the other SHC factors discussed below, motivation is an inherited, organizational trait that encompasses the entirety of the USMC. *Inherited*, within the context of this study, implies that a specific trait or practice is organic to the fundamental Marine Corps ethos, rather than a specific function or process exclusive to Marine aviation. Motivation is cultivated and developed from day one, upon entering the Marine Corps. Motivation is what keeps *all* Marines going, not just pilots or mechanics, while working or fighting through demanding situations and austere environments.

Marine noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are small-unit leaders (roughly equivalent to junior or mid-level managers) who thrive upon and exude motivation. It is the primary

responsibility of these leaders to bring out the best in junior Marines. They use various approaches to accomplish this task, such as appealing to the internal desires of those under their charge or forcefully applying external stimuli during a critical situation. An experienced Marine aviation NCO, for example, is equally capable of encouraging others to surmount a particular maintenance task by either appealing to their desire to lead—a la Pink’s *autonomy* argument—or by offering incentives to facilitate a particular task—per Adams’s *Equity Theory*.

### ***Job Analysis & Workforce Planning***

Job analysis and workforce planning are two critical elements of the SHC system, best defined by their strategic emphasis on the human capital approach in sculpting productive and stable workforces. Professor of public administration at the University of South Florida, Joan E. Pynes, observes that, “For organizations to remain competitive, they must accurately identify and forecast their human resource needs” (2013, p. 141). Lynchburg College’s associate professor of management, Sally Coleman Selden, adds that, “Workforce planning is the process of identifying positions, skills, and competencies that will be required in the future” (2009, p. 23). In both cases, Pynes and Selden emphasize the importance of properly identifying present needs along with the equally important ability to accurately predict future demands. Pynes advises that managers observe the following six elements of job analysis:

- **Recruitment and Selection-** Identifying the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOCs) required for each position (2013, p. 142).
- **Developing Compensation Systems-** A standardized procedure for systematically determining pay and other benefits across the organization (2013, p. 142).

- **HR Planning, Career Development, and Training-** Processes or programs that help employees identify and improve skills for specific jobs (2013, p. 142),
- **Performance Evaluation-** An objective analysis of how well employees perform their jobs (2013, p. 143).
- **Risk Management-** An analysis of potential job hazards that could potentially prove detrimental to the health, safety, or well-being of an organizations employees (2013, p. 143).
- **Job Design-** The act of arranging jobs around a set of work activities designed to enable the organization to carry out its mission (2013, p. 143).

Marine aviation leaders address job analysis and workforce planning with a similar approach. Some methods are inherited from broader organizational practices, while others are more specific to Marine aviation. Recruitment and selection procedures, for example, are performed on an organizational level, with specially trained, uniformed agents canvassing and selecting candidates for entry in the USMC. Internal selection procedures, on the other hand, rely on performance evaluations and the recommendations of senior leaders. Thus, everyone enters basic training or candidate school on a level playing field. Individual advancement, however, is dependent upon a number of variables related to occupational tasks and continued performance. Some specific Marine aviation examples relating to job analysis and workforce planning include:

- **Compensation Systems:** The USMC and, by extension, Marine aviation compensate their employees both directly and indirectly. Salaries are generally lower than those offered in the private sector but uniform across the organization. Plentiful benefits, such as life insurance and pension plans, help in stabilizing the workforce. Compensation systems are discussed in greater detail below.

- **HR Planning, Career Development, and Training:** Workforce planners stress the importance of stability and combat readiness of the Marine aviation organization. Managers frequently employ tools, such as KPIs and MOS Roadmaps. Both methods are addressed later in this section.
- **Performance Evaluation:** Marine aviation's primary means of objectively tracking the performance of its workforce is the Individual Training Standards System Maintenance Training Evaluation Program—short title, ITSS (MATMEP). The ITSS (MATMEP) is covered in the corresponding performance management section of this analysis.
- **Risk Management:** Supervisors employ Organizational Risk Management, or ORM, to reduce health, safety, and security risks across Marine aviation. Marine aviation policy-makers consider ORM an integral aspect of training and development, which are addressed below.
- **Job Design:** Most Marines consider wearing the uniform a lifestyle rather than a job. The closest approximating to factors affecting job design are work activities associated with specific MOSs, which are related to observable data collected from KPIs and the ITSS (MATMEP). Job design is thus discussed in detail near the conclusion of this analysis.

### *Compensation & Benefits*

The third major element of the SHC system involves compensation and benefits. Both, according to Selden, are considered types of retention strategies (2009, p. 75). The former correlates to direct compensation, usually in the form of competitive salaries, while the latter typically refers to indirect methods of recompense (Selden, 2009, p. 75). Traditional benefits

include attractive programs such as life insurance policies, healthcare plans, and pensions (Selden, 2009, p. 75-77). Non-traditional benefits speak to the changing demands of today's diverse workforce and include work-life bonuses such as compressed work weeks, telecommuting, on-site child care, and paid family leave (Selden, 2009, p. 79).

The USMC and, by extension, Marine aviation offer conventional compensation and benefits on par with other federal organizations including competitive pay, enlistment and retention bonuses, healthcare and insurance, housing allowance, and pension plans. The latter of these is particularly attractive to many Marines who, after twenty years of service, have the option of retiring from active duty service and immediately receiving a monthly stipend. Other, less tangible rewards include various veteran benefits and the simple pride of service.

### ***Performance Management***

The fourth element of the SHC system, performance management, involves the comprehensive analysis of what motivates employees and how to satisfy their intrinsic needs. "Because employees are essential to the delivery of quality services," offers Pynes, "performance evaluation is a critical component of strategic human resource management (SHRM) in public and nonprofit agencies" (2013, p. 304). Performance evaluations, like many other aspects of the SHRM equation, require a strategic approach. The prevailing theory is that satisfied employees, who are provided routine and objective feedback, will perform at optimal levels thereby improving organizational efficiency (Pynes, 2013, p. 304). Successful performance management systems require the implementation of an effective evaluation program, objective rater training, executive evaluations, proper documentation, and team-based performance techniques (Pynes, 2013, p. 311-329).

Marine aviation managers rely on the ITSS (MATMEP) program to monitor the performance of their employees. Navy and Marine Corps leaders began collaborating on the program more than twenty years ago, aiming to establish a system that would “meet a centralized management and decentralized execution philosophy of training” popular across both services (CMC, 2002, p. 1).

The traditional ITSS (MATMEP) system relied upon *training jackets*, which were essentially a collection of tiered training standards, that supervisors and employees used at periodic intervals to gauge individual performance—imagine large file folders bursting at the seams with countless reams of paper. Raters and ratees would engage in periodic counseling sessions where the supervisor would assign an introductory task and a prescribed timeframe to achieve a specific level of proficiency in each area. Progressive tiers were assigned Roman numerals, with a tier-I task representing the most rudimentary elements of an overall process and a tier-IV task representing mastery of an assigned duty area. Initial goals and objectives were primarily linear, with the supervisor selecting a specific timeframe needed to achieve each task. As work became more elaborate, however, the trainee could engage in two-way conversations about the subject matter and request that target goals be moved according to individual comprehension and comfort levels.

On a macro-level, these individual performance standards were contrasted against output metrics and individual readiness requirements. Comparative results would give shop supervisors a realistic means of measuring and evaluating the overall output and production capacities of their assigned sections. The program held the additional benefit of providing a means to track and document individual performance. All of this was then incorporated within a unit readiness matrix that was established to track progress towards strategic goals, such as aircraft

accessibility, personnel qualifications, and mission readiness. The system proved its worth and is consequently still in use today, albeit in a streamlined electronic format where a web-based application, Advanced Skills Management (ASM) has since replaced dusty old files and training jackets.

### ***Development, Training & Providing New Opportunities***

Continuous development, comprehensive training, and the providing of new opportunities are three factors rounding-out the SHC system. Each exists along a continuous spectrum of workforce growth. Training addressing present and short-term demands related to job proficiency, while development techniques encompass a more strategic view of long-term training requirements (Pynes, 2013, pp. 275-278). The introduction of new opportunities, meanwhile, enhances experiences on both fronts (Pynes, 2013, pp. 275-278). Broadly speaking, all three factors fall under the larger umbrella of training and career development, which stresses the importance of comprehensive ability assessments, efficient training programs, and career development (Pynes, 2013, pp. 278-293).

Fundamental training evolutions within Marine aviation are primarily based upon the previously discussed ITSS (MATMEP). Formally tied to this program was the MOS Roadmap, a collaborative byproduct of the NAE and the qualitative tracking of KPIs (Davis, 2007, p. 205). MOS Roadmaps were paper documents that presented the participant with a tiered collection of professional benchmarks commonly achieved by individual employees who traditionally excelled within their assigned occupational fields. New pilots, for instance, could thus map out their careers in the footsteps of successful pilots who preceded them.

Simple MOS Roadmaps eventually evolved into an immensely more elaborate program used by Marine aviation managers today. The Marine Aviation Distributed Virtual Training

Environment (ADVTE), along with a variety of assorted virtual roadmaps, represent the pinnacle of occupational development and training within Marine aviation (Davis, 2017, p. 273). The online application allows the real-time tracking of functions and tasks associated with the execution of multiple jobs across a broad spectrum of duties. When a pilot completes a landing, for example, the task is logged within the system. Information is then compiled and distributed across a wide and accessible network where managers can assess the overall capabilities of the workforce (Davis, 2017, p. 273).

Data, statistics, and feedback extracted from the ADVTE are routinely forwarded to senior-level workforce planners who address critical aspects of job design. Manpower professionals additionally assist in the collecting and interpreting of this information, the application of KPIs (roughly equivalent to KSAOCs), and strategic job analysis. Feedback is administered via routine mentorship sessions where seasoned Marines strive to personally and professionally develop assigned mentees. The entire process is something akin to the job analysis process outlined by Pynes in her 2013 reader, *Human Resources Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (pp. 137-173).

Training and operating evolutions within a military environment present many risks, which prompted the introduction of ORM within Marine aviation in the late 1990s. “The focus of RM [risk management],” according to USMC policy-makers, “is to identify and mitigate risk in all activities, both on and off duty... associated with human factors in the workplace, behavioral healthcare, and behavioral lifestyles that can affect readiness.” (CMC, 2014, p. 1). ORM is thus an organizational approach to institutionally modifying the behavior of a workforce. Correctly implemented, ORM has the potential of achieving its intended objectives of saving lives, reducing accidents, and cutting costs. Sound ORM techniques call for strategic oversight,

making the process more a matter of employee development rather than a simple training process. Findings and recommendations concerning the implementation and effectiveness of ORM are detailed near the conclusion of this paper.

Marine aviation career development programs generally meet the needs of the organization in delivering, documenting, and redefining aviation training standards. Even the most efficient programs can grow stagnant, however, which is what prompted policy-makers to seek fresh perspectives outside the organization. In looking to provide Marine pilots with new opportunities abroad, aviation managers employed the Personnel Exchange Program (PEP).

The PEP allows Marine aviators to exchange billets with “sister services, allies, and partners,” while continuing to, “expand exchange programs to share tactical expertise and employment concepts for a new generation of aircraft, unmanned aircraft systems, and C2 [command and control] technology” (Davis, 2017, p. 230). Inter-service participation, in addition to allowing specialists to collaborate on a variety of topics, fulfills the congressional mandate, as outlined in the National Security Act of 1947, that the Marine Corps lend its subject matter expertise of amphibious operations to its sister services (Hittle, 2013). Five major allied-countries currently participate in the program, exchanging pilots and specialists across a dozen different aircraft or occupational fields. Attack helicopter pilots from Australia, for instance, are trained to fly Marine Corps AH-1 “Cobras,” while Marine aviators fly Australian “Tigers.” This robust exchange enhances the development of critical skills, while simultaneously improving combat readiness.

### ***Summary***

Marine aviation, although a unique institution, shares many similarities with other public organizations. Chief among these, are the focused desire and concrete need to train and develop a

diverse and otherwise heavily-tasked workforce. In doing so, policy-makers have adopted and implemented many classical aspects of the traditional SHC system, including the five core concepts of: (1) Motivation, (2) Job Analysis & Workforce Planning, (3) Compensation & Benefits, (4) Performance Management, and (5) Development, Training & the Providing of New Opportunities (Selden, 2009, p. 10). Some aspects of the Marine aviation SHC system correlate directly to civilian models, such as the variety of traditional benefits offered to retain personnel and stabilize the workforce. Other aspects of the military model, however, differ in scope and application. Motivation, for example, is a subjective factor that Marine aviation leaders approach from a unique perspective. Ultimately, Marine aviation leaders understand that their most valuable assets are not multimillion dollar aircraft but instead the Marines who constitute their workforce. Skill training and career development are thus of paramount concern in shaping an effective and efficient organization capable of meeting future national security challenges across the globe.

## **Findings & Recommendations**

### ***Introduction***

USMC leaders and Marine aviation policy-makers administer over a fundamentally sound SHC system. Two critical faults exist, however, concerning the access of vital benefits and the rigors of conflicting training requirements. Overall, the system speaks to the needs of Marine aviation, which is a workforce that requires strategic and consistent oversight to accomplish a demanding and multifaceted mission. Nevertheless, improvements could be made in some areas. Detailed recommendations concerning these findings are outlined below.

### ***Motivation***

Motivation, or the force that compels people to act, is not exclusive to Marine aviation. Nevertheless, how Marine leaders instill and cultivate motivation in and amongst Marines is, institutionally unique. Moreover, the USMC's approach in motivating its workforce somewhat defies academic convention and normative theories of typical behavior. On the other hand, certain aspects of accepted theories are certainly applicable; combat Marines are motivated by threatening external stimuli, for example. The organization is also well-known for its rigorous and demanding indoctrination program, which is designed to stress-test officer candidates and Marine Corps recruits, often pushing aspiring Marines to their breaking points. Many people who join the Marines also exhibit prototypical "Type I" personalities, a term Daniel Pink uses in describing behavior that "is fueled more by intrinsic desires than extrinsic ones... more with the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself" (Pink, 2009, p. 75). So, where does this leave Marine aviation? How can organizational leaders build upon, or otherwise improve, an institutional climate already steeped in motivation?

One way of approaching the matter is to view the situation from the perspective of public administration and policy professor Charles T. Goodsell who, in his 2011 book, *Mission Mystique*, endorses W. Richard Scott's view that organizational beliefs are founded upon three pillars of institutional behavior (p. 6). The first pillar is "regulative" in that it relies upon a system of rules that regulates behavior through the administration of rewards and punishments (Goodsell, 2011, p. 6). Regulations are a major aspect of military service and Marine aviation. The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) is a codified system of articles and military laws that, through the administration of punitive and non-punitive measures, regulates the behavior of U.S. service members (Estes, 1996, p. 158). Fear of reprimand, punishment, or imprisonment motivates Marines to follow orders given by senior leaders, superior officers, and the President of the United States. Exemplary behavior, on the other hand, is rewarded with the presentation of citations and medals or, in some rare cases, accelerated promotions.

Less dramatic, but equally as important, are the remaining two pillars. The "normative pillar" emphasizes values, norms, goals and "how things should be done" (Goodsell, 2011, p. 6). Examples of this in Marine aviation include the institutional emphasis that supervisors place on valuable leadership traits, such as integrity, which guide Marines along an ethically and morally acceptable path. The final, "cognitive pillar" of Goodsell and Scott's argument is predicated upon the meaning and significance of cultural symbols, rituals, and the transfer of "shared values" (2011, p. 6). The USMC and Marine aviation excel in this area, as the passing-down of collective memories and historical traditions is an integral aspect of earning the title *Marine*. Most Marines generally feel that they must live up to the reputation and beliefs of those who preceded them. Senior enlisted advisors are frequently entrusted with important symbols of command, such as battle standards, that are celebrated during formal ceremonies.

With all the above taken into consideration, it is still difficult to pinpoint a single course of action that would improve motivation in Marine aviation. If anything, leaders can continue to appeal to the normative and cognitive aspects of intrinsic motivation that, in Pink's estimation, is exponentially more effective than relying on external stimuli (Pink, 2009, pp. 74-76). Guided discussions about the importance of maintaining customs and traditions, while bringing continued credit upon the entire institution, often appeal to altruistic Marines wishing to serve a cause greater than their personal needs. In short, USMC and Marine aviation leaders are adept at motivating their fellow Marines and leave little to improve in this area of the SHC system.

### ***Job Analysis & Workforce Planning***

Job analysis and workforce planning encompass six specific and interdependent elements—Recruitment and Selection, Developing Compensation Systems, HR Planning, Career Development, & Training, Performance Evaluation, Risk Management, and Job Design—that are individually addressed in the following two subsections (Pynes, 2013, pp. 142-144). The myriad means by which USMC workforce planners and Marine aviation analysts administer compensation & benefits, performance management systems, and career development plans contextually correlate to the broader SHC system, which ultimately dictates the long-term effectiveness of the workforce and, by proxy, the organization as a whole.

### ***Compensation & Benefits***

Marines are directly compensated through salary levels set by Congress that, by virtue of appointments, political policies, and budgetary limitations, are beyond the control of USMC and Marine aviation managers. Additionally, Marines are indirectly compensated with many benefits, both traditional and non-traditional, which were discussed in the preceding section. Pension

plans, for example, are available for those planning to retire from active duty service and most bases offer daycare programs for Marines with children. The introduction of other non-traditional benefits is largely impractical due to unavoidable conflicts with operational commitments. Flex schedules and job sharing, for instance, are incompatible with combat operations where employees do not adhere to set schedules.

The most pressing issue facing workforce planners is not the volume or type of indirect compensation available to Marines, but instead the accessibility of certain benefits. A 2013 *Stars and Stripes* article brought attention to planners who, in an underhanded attempt to cut costs, stamped new restrictions on the Marine Corps Tuition Assistance (TA) Program (Burke, 2013). Unlike college-bound soldiers or sailors, Marines seeking higher education were deemed ineligible for financial assistance if they had completed less than two years of active service (Burke, 2013). Additional requirements, such as the completion of professional military education (PME) correspondence courses and specific promotion criteria, were made mandatory prior to considering a Marine eligible for the TA program (Burke, 2013). Some of these restrictions were recently lifted but others remain in place. The net result is less access to higher education for many Marines who simply make too little money to pay for college courses “out of pocket.” From an SHC perspective, this seems a poor decision and one that will hopefully be corrected soon.

### ***Performance Management, Development, & Training***

In the previous section, performance management and development & training were addressed as two separate entities. This section, however, is concerned with findings and recommendations that are based upon commonly observed problems in both elements of Marine

aviation's SHC system, which systematically affect the career development and strategic progression of the entire workforce. Plainly put, aviation Marines suffer from overtraining.

Marine aviation occupies a unique niche in an organization already recognized for its fluid persona. As the Estes quotation at the beginning of this paper noted, the Marine Corps "is a military anomaly," and Marines are part soldiers and part sailors (Estes, 1996, p. 8). Aviation Marines, in a similar fashion, are part highly-trained technicians and part tactical warfighters, too. These individuals thus stand at a unique crossroads where there are at once expected to operate and repair some of the world's most sophisticated technology, while simultaneously remaining proficient in combat arms. In other words, your average Marine Corps "grease monkey" must be equally capable of replacing a jet engine as accurately shooting a rifle at 500 yards.

All the standards and training metrics associated with these two frequently conflicting commitments are informally divided into two categories. Marine Corps leaders often refer to ground-training, or tactical commitments, as *greenside training*. Technical, aviation training, on the other hand, is called *blue-side training*. These monikers informally stem from the color of the uniforms worn by Naval aviation professionals (blue) and the camouflage combat utilities worn by infantry Marines (green). Marine aviation professionals are forced to embrace aspects of both regimes in performing their duties.

This training duality culminates in an overwhelming amount of periodic commitments that frequently stack atop an already strenuous workload. In addition to participating in week-long annual marksmanship training, for example, the average Marine aviation mechanic is expected to meet the following training commitments:

- Semiannual Physical Fitness Testing

- Annual Performance Evaluations
- Weekly Technical Training
- Weekly On-the-Job (OJT) Training
- Grade-Specific Completion of Non-Resident (Distance Education) Leadership and Professional Military Courses
- Grade-Specific Completion of Resident (Brick & Mortar) Leadership and Professional Military Courses
- Quarterly Safety Training
- Annual Suicide Prevention Training
- Semiannual Equal Opportunity (EO) and Sexual Assault Prevention & Reporting (SAPR) Training
- Annual Health Awareness Training
- Daily Physical Fitness Training
- Periodic Marine Corps Martial Arts Training
- Periodic Team-Building Exercises
- ITSS (MATMEP) and ASM Compliance Training
- Annual Security and Information Assurance Training
- Annual Personally Identifiable Information and Information Technology Training

Maintaining such a flexible and highly-trained workforce comes at a price. In a recent *Military Times* article, journalist Patricia Kime lamented that, “In 2014, 269 active-duty service members and 169 reserve and National Guard troops took their own lives... The suicide rate per 100,000 active-duty troops was 19.9, up slightly from 18.7 in 2013 but down from 22.7 in

2012... Being in the military once offered some protection from suicide susceptibility; in 2002, the rate was 10.3 per 100,000 — much lower than a civilian adjusted rate...” (2016). This is not to suggest that overstressed aviation Marines are taking their own lives because of overtraining. Instead, it simply illustrates that Marines do not live in a vacuum and, despite their dedication to duty, are not insulated from the stresses of training conflicts and overtraining.

It is unrealistic to expect Marine aviation professionals to continually operate under the combined strain of ever-increasing workloads and training requirements—especially while fighting prolonged conflicts abroad. On the other hand, the USMC can ill-afford any sort of compromise in today’s chaotic national security environment. Nevertheless, leaders would do well in addressing the issue of overtraining within Marine aviation, which is already stretched to its fiscal and material breaking point.

### ***Summary***

The SHC system is not a panacea for the troubles currently befalling Marine aviation but is nevertheless a good place to start. Much of what USMC policy-makers and aviation leaders do, within the context of SHRM, is fundamentally right. Critical and systemic failures in some aspects of the system, however, are detrimental to the entire organization. Marines are a motivated and stubborn bunch who take great pride in their duties. Motivation can only carry an organization so far, however, which is where SHC is vital in bridging serious institutional HR gaps. Marine aviation will undoubtedly enjoy a bright future, provided its leadership addresses serious shortfalls concerning the accessibility of vital benefits and critical conflicts within the current training environment.

## **Conclusion**

Marine aviation and its parent organization, the USMC, are steeped in a rich, historical military tradition and widely regarded as the nation's foremost combat force in readiness. Part soldier and part sailors, Marines are charged with projecting and protecting America's political, national, and financial interests abroad, through the amphibious deployment of air and ground assets ashore. Marines pride themselves on their steadfast devotion to their country and the three core leadership tenets of honor, courage, and commitment.

Marine Corps policy-makers, like other public organization leaders, must consider the strategic welfare of their workforce to remain competitive in today's changing world. Economic and material challenges currently present the greatest obstacle to Marine aviation leaders who, for the past fifteen years have pushed an aging fleet of fatigued aircraft to their literal limits. Budgetary constraints and spending caps prompted creative and innovative solutions to these problems, including the adoption of several SHRM techniques and elements of the SHC system, including the five core concepts of: (1) Motivation, (2) Job Analysis & Workforce Planning, (3) Compensation & Benefits, (4) Performance Management, and (5) Development, Training & the Providing of New Opportunities (Selden, 2009, p. 10).

Marine aviation leaders are inherently proficient at some of these techniques, such as cultivating motivation across a diverse workforce. This is due to the practices having been inherited from its parent organization, the USMC, which cherishes and celebrates a unique military pedigree founded upon motivation and devoting to duty. The incorporation of other SHC practices, however, are less intuitive.

Two major faults with the current state of HR in Marine aviation concern the accessibility of certain benefits and the chronic overtraining of personnel. In the case of the former, Marine

leaders restricted access to TA programs in an effort to cut costs in an already dismal fiscal environment. In the case of the latter, multiple training commitments, stemming from development programs both internal and external to Marine aviation, have placed undue strain on many aviation Marines. While not entirely conclusive, it is logical to assume that the increased pressure of meeting multiple, conflicting training commitments is detrimental to the Marine aviation workforce.

Ultimately Marine aviation leaders preside over a fairly sound SHC system. Like any other organization, however, there is always room for improvement. The SHC system currently in place within Marine aviation is very much a work in progress but one that, with refinement and consistent application, will result in a productive and flexible SHRM environment. This outcome should likewise appeal to USMC and Marine aviation leaders who are concerned with increasing the combat effectiveness of their respective departments and the overall organization across the board.

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